

- c. *fair*: *fair* (Adjective) 'beautiful, attractive'  
           *fair* (Noun) 'holiday'
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By contrast, word-forms may have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings. Such forms are called HOMOPHONES. See this example from a joke book:

[2.12]

Why does the pony cough?  
 Because he's a little hoarse.  
 (Young and Young 1981:57)

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The joke is a pun on /h:s/, the pronunciation of the two lexemes represented in writing by *horse* and *hoarse*. Other examples of homophones include *tail* ~ *tale*, *sail* ~ *sale*, *weather* ~ *whether*, *see* ~ *sea*, *read* ~ *reed*, *reel* ~ *real*, *seen* ~ *scene*, *need* ~ *knead*.

Conversely, it is also possible to have several closely related meanings that are realised by the same word-form. The name for this is POLYSEMY. Often you find several senses listed under a single heading in a dictionary. For instance, under the entry for the noun *force*, the *OED* lists over ten senses. I have reproduced the first six below:

[2.13]

1. Physical strength. Rarely in *pl.* (= Fr. *forces*—1818.)
  2. Strength, impetus, violence, or intensity of effect ME.
  3. Power or might; esp. military power ME. b. In early use, the strength (of a defensive work etc.). Subseq., the fighting strength of a ship. 1577.
  4. A body of armed men, an army. In *pl.* the troops or soldiers composing the fighting strength of a kingdom or a commander ME. b. A body of police; often absol. *the force*=policemen collectively. 1851.
  5. Physical strength or power exerted on an object; esp. violence or physical coercion. ME.
  6. Mental or moral strength. Now only, power of effective action, or of overcoming resistance. ME.
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The line that separates polysemy from homonymy is somewhat blurred because it is not altogether clear how far meanings need to diverge before we should treat words representing them as belonging to distinct lexemes. In [2.13], it is not entirely clear that the sixth sense of the noun *force* is not sufficiently removed from the other meanings to merit an entry of its own. The other meanings all show a reasonably strong family resemblance. But mental or moral strength shows a somewhat weaker relationship.

In the *OED*, there is a separate entry for the lexeme *force*, the verb. It is considered a different lexeme because it has a different meaning and belongs to a different word-class, being a verb and not a noun. Belonging to different word-classes is an important consideration in determining whether separate dictionary entries are needed.

In real-life communication, the lack of a one-to-one match between lexemes and word-forms does not necessarily cause ambiguity. In context, the relevant meaning is normally easy to determine. But there are cases where it is not. For instance, the homonymy of *bat* in [2.14] can cause semantic confusion:

[2.14]

I saw a *bat* under the tree.

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